

# RECLAMATION

*Managing Water in the West*

## FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

# Tulare Irrigation District Plum Basin Project – Phase I

FONSI-09-77

Recommended by:



Michael Inthavong  
Natural Resources Specialist  
South-Central California Area Office

Date:

6/3/2010

Concurred by:



Chuck Siek  
Supervisory, Natural Resources Specialist  
South-Central California Area Office

Date:

6/4/10

Concurred by:



Mike Kinsey  
Acting Chief, Resources Management Division  
South-Central California Area Office

Date:

06/18/2010

Approved by:



Laura Myers  
Deputy Area Manager  
South-Central California Area Office

Date:

6/21/10



U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Reclamation  
South-Central California Area Office

June 2010

## Introduction

In accordance with section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), as amended, the South-Central California Area Office of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), has determined that the approval to partially fund Phase I of Tulare Irrigation District's (TID) Plum Basin Project is not a major federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment and an Environmental Impact Statement is not required. This draft Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is supported by Reclamation's draft Environmental Assessment (EA) number EA-09-77, *Tulare Irrigation District Plum Basin Project – Phase I*, and is hereby incorporated by reference.

Reclamation provided the public with an opportunity to comment on the draft FONSI and draft EA from March 16, 2010 through April 9, 2010. No comments were received.

## Background

In January 2008, TID purchased 154-acres of property consisting of plum orchards and fallowed ground. In a joint-effort with the City of Tulare, TID prepared an Initial Study (IS) and finalized a Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) in January 2009, in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act, to analyze the environmental impacts of converting 154 acres of property into a three-cell recharge/regulation basin (Plum Basin Project). About this same time, TID applied to Reclamation for a Water for America Challenge Grant (Challenge Grant) and was selected as a potential recipient for federal funds to help develop the one of three cells of the Plum Basin Project.

Reclamation proposes to award TID with a Challenge Grant for the development of Phase I of the Plum Basin Project (Proposed Action). The Proposed Action will include converting 37 acres of fallowed ground into a basin (cell #1) with groundwater recharge and surface water regulating capabilities. The fallowed ground will be excavated up to 6 feet (ft) deep and the excavated materials will be used to build up 6-ft tall levees in cell #1. Construction will also include inlet/outlet structures between the basin and TID's Main Canal. The inlet/outlet structures will be outfitted with control gates, flowmeters, and other related appurtenances.

## Findings

### Biological Resources

The project area consists of the conversion of recently fallowed land that is frequently tilled for weed control. Although San Joaquin kit fox and Swainson's hawk have been reported in the area, disking for weed control has seriously degraded any suitable habitat or foraging ground for sensitive species. Reclamation has determined that the Proposed Action will have no effect to either kit fox or Swainson's hawk designated under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and no consultation with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) is required.

Preconstruction surveys will be conducted before any ground-disturbing activities are to begin. If the surveys detect the presence of listed species, then the Proposed Action will be paused while Reclamation revisits the ESA determination and completes any consultation with the USFWS that might be necessary.

If preconstruction surveys find that no special-status species are present within the project area, then Reclamation's determination remains and the project could move forward. By following Environmental Protection Measures listed in section 2.2.1 of the EA, this would avoid or minimize any potential impacts to kit fox or Swainson's hawk during construction. Therefore, the Proposed Action is anticipated to have no significant impacts on biological resources.

### **Cultural Resources**

The Proposed Action is the type of activity that has the potential to affect historic properties. A records search, a cultural resources survey, and Tribal consultation identified historic properties within the area of potential effects. All project activities will avoid historic properties; therefore, there would be no adverse impacts pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800.5(b). Since no historic properties will be affected, cultural resources will not be significantly impacted as a result of implementing Proposed Action.

### **Indian Trust Assets (ITA)**

There are no tribes possessing legal property interests held in trust by the United States in the lands involved with the Proposed Action. The nearest ITA is the Santa Rosa Rancheria approximately 18 miles west/north-west of the project location; therefore, this action will have no significant impacts on ITA.

### **Socioeconomic Resources**

The Proposed Action will increase the surface water reliability for TID. As a result, the viability of farming practices will also benefit from a more reliable irrigation water supply. Design and construction of the Proposed Action will temporarily increase jobs; therefore, the Proposed Action could result in slight beneficial impacts to socioeconomic resources.

### **Environmental Justice**

To the extent that water supply reliability is improved in Tulare County, it will serve to support the continued viability of available municipal and industrial water to the surrounding communities and irrigation water for local farms. As a result, there will be slight beneficial impacts to environmental justice from the implementation of the Proposed Action.

### **Global Climate Change**

The Proposed Action will involve short-term impacts consisting of emissions during construction and long-term. Accordingly, project construction and operations under the Proposed Action would result in *de minimis* and no significant impacts to global climate change.

### **Air Quality**

Comparison of the estimated Proposed Action emissions with the thresholds for Federal conformity determinations indicates that project emissions are estimated to be below these thresholds. Accordingly, project construction and operations under the Proposed Action will not result in significant impacts to air quality beyond Federal thresholds.

### **Water Resources**

The Proposed Action will not generate a new supply of water; rather, it would improve the reliability of TID water supplies by using surface water to recharge the underlying groundwater

subbasin for use by private landowners within the district when groundwater pumping is necessary. The Proposed Action does not include additional groundwater pumping; instead, it will help to mitigate the water-level impacts associated with existing groundwater pumping. The ability to regulate surface water will help TID minimize seepage losses in its distribution system. Therefore, the Proposed Action will have slight beneficial impacts to TID's water resources.

## **Land Use**

The Proposed Action will not result in adverse impacts to lands designated as prime agricultural land since the construction of water facilities have been determined to be compatible uses within any agricultural preserve; therefore, there will be no significant impacts to land use.

## **Cumulative Impacts**

Biological resources will continue to be affected by other types of activities that are ongoing but unrelated to the Proposed Action. Impacts to biological resources from the implementation of the Proposed Action will occur only during construction activities. Pending results from the kit fox and Swainson's hawk surveys, the Proposed Action, when added to other existing and proposed actions, will not contribute to cumulative significant impacts to wildlife resources since construction activities are short-term.

The Proposed Action will not impact historic properties; therefore, it is not expected to contribute to cumulative significant impacts on cultural resources.

Greenhouse gas (GHG) impacts are considered to be cumulative impacts. The Proposed Action, when added to other existing and proposed actions, will not contribute to cumulative significant impacts to global climate change owing to the *de minimis* magnitude of annual GHG emissions.

The Proposed Action will not contribute to cumulative significant impacts to air quality since construction emissions involved with the full build-out of the overall Plum Basin Project have been estimated to be below Federal conformity thresholds.

The Proposed Action, when added to other similar existing and proposed actions, will have a slight beneficial contribution to cumulative impacts associated with environmental justice and socioeconomic resources. The Proposed Action will help support and maintain farm-related jobs that low-income and disadvantaged populations rely upon. In addition, some of these communities rely on groundwater as their main source of water supply so the long-term application of groundwater recharge will provide some replenishment to this source.

In recent years, land use changes in TID have involved the urbanization of agricultural lands. These types of changes are typically driven by economic pressures and are as likely to occur without the Proposed Action as with it. While prime farmland will be converted into a recharge/regulation basin, such conversion is considered a compatible use with any agricultural preserve. In the long run, the Proposed Action will result in an improvement in water supply reliability and groundwater level conditions, which will benefit other lands that are designated as prime agricultural lands. Accordingly, no cumulative significant impacts to land use are anticipated. When added to other similar projects, the Proposed Action will not contribute to cumulative significant impacts to resources.